

Emotional Survival Guide for COVID-19

April 3, 2020

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Right now, things are strange and uncertainty is our new normal. Many of us are currently experiencing a range of different emotional responses to the current situation. The following is a guide that I put together to help myself, my colleagues, and others cope with the increasing fear, depression, stress, boredom, frustration, confusion, and isolation (to name a few) surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a challenging time and stressors from work (or lack thereof), family, school, and the state of unknown can overwhelm us. This increased stress targets our immune systems, making us more susceptible to mental and/or physical illness.

I encourage you to take a moment and ask yourself **“What can I do right now to make myself feel a little better? What do I need?”** Then pay attention to those answers! Do something to help yourself feel a bit more in control. After all, there is so much that is outside of our control; however, we can control how we respond and how we feel moment to moment.

We have choices (even when it feels like we may not). Pay attention to yourself and what you need and **make intentional and mindful choices** throughout your day to break up the worry or stress, boredom or isolation.

Go through this list of options, add your own ideas, circle ones that you might want to do or that could work for you, and then put them on your schedule or set a reminder on your phone to try them out! Sit down with your loved ones and this list and go through all of the things that could work for you or your family to relieve some of the frustration, then work them into your day.

Many of us went from highly structured, routine days to absolute chaos and uncertainty. If there is one thing most of us find uncomfortable it is not knowing what to expect day to day, moment to moment. **Create a structure and organize your day with what you need to do and things you want to do.** Then try to follow it as best as possible.

Remember, there is no right or wrong way to feel at this time! Everyone reacts differently to stress and everyone has different strategies for coping with these stressors, including an outbreak of infectious disease. The following list includes items for coping with stress. Adding some of these activities into your day can help provide structure and prevent these feelings from becoming overwhelming. Think about your stress as if it was measured by an old-fashioned mercury thermometer, as stress increases the “temperature” will rise, each stressor adding to the one before it. This leads to feelings of being overwhelmed, out of control, and/or hopeless.

There are also online resources that are available, as well as a million more that aren’t included! **Spend time finding something that will help ground you and keep you calm.** It’s far more productive in the long run than watching the never-ending stream of panic regarding the virus.

We will get through this together. Stay healthy and well. For those of you on the frontline, those of you responding to the needs of your community, your friends and family, know that your efforts are not unrecognized. We appreciate your service.

Thinking of you all

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Strategies for Managing Emotions During this Period of Isolation and Stress

Create a Different Emotion – Watch a funny YouTube clip/show/video/movie; Listen to a comedian, Ask Alexa to tell you a joke; Listen to soothing music (if you're feeling anxious) or upbeat music (if you're feeling sad or down); Do something silly; Remember a funny thing that happened in the past in great detail; LAUGH OUT LOUD; Identify things for which you are grateful

Ground – Use your five senses to focus you in the present moment: List 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear; 3 things you can smell; 2 things you can feel/touch; 1 thing you can taste; Remind yourself of who you are NOW: state your name, your age, where you are now, what you have done today, what you are going to do next; Move your feet, notice the sensation as you connect to the floor; hold a mug of tea/coffee in your hand, notice the feel of the mug in your hands, inhale the scent, take small sips and be aware of the sensation of drinking; Breathe deeply, paying attention to the feeling of the air entering and expanding your lungs, pause for a moment before exhaling, feeling the movement of your breathe.

Create a different intense sensation – Hold ice cubes in your hands until they melt; Chew ice cubes; Listen to loud music; Take a cold shower; Squeeze a stress ball; Pet your dog or cat; Change your body temperature: Dip your whole face in cold water for 10 secs, hold hands/wrists under cold water

Paced Breathing - Exhale for a count of 7 (hold your breath for the remainder of the count if you can't inhale or exhale for the full count). Do this for 5-10 minutes! It will be uncomfortable at first since your body isn't used to breathing so slowly. Keep going, through the discomfort until your body regulates and you feel calmer.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation – Tense and release your muscles one at a time starting from your toes and working up to your face. Hold the tension for 5 seconds, squeezing tightly, then release slowly and fully. Exhale and move to next muscle group. There are lots of YouTube videos to guide you in this as well.

Movement – Stretch; do jumping jacks, sit-ups, or push-ups; do yoga; dance; go for a walk/hike/run/bike ride; clean vigorously; run sprints; run up and down the stairs; hold a plank for 60 secs; do wall sits, lift weights

Pause - Walk away from the stressful situation if possible (even for a moment), Take a deep breath; Put the stress in an imaginary box and put it on an imaginary shelf (it will be there later to come back to if needed); You have control of your mind. You don't actually have to act on emotions or urges: Make a choice to delay acting on impulses for an hour and do something else to pass the time.

Imagine being someplace else – where is your favorite place? A beach? A ski slope? Someone else's house? A Park? Go there in your mind. Imagine every detail – what sounds do you hear? What do you smell? What do you see around you?

Give yourself a brief vacation – turn off phones or other devices, unplug and relax momentarily to recharge yourself – emotionally and physically; take a nap, stretch, go outside and breathe some fresh air

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Contribute – help out a neighbor or co-worker, call/text a friend and see how they are doing, reach out to someone you haven't spoken to in a while, help around the house, clean up, fix something, create a bag of donations of items you don't need anymore, make a card for someone, help someone with homework or schoolwork, take care of your pet (for example, walk or feed the dog), order takeout from your local restaurants that are struggling

Be Kind to yourself – validate yourself “This is hard and I'm doing the best I can” or “This won't last forever. I will get through this.” Think of stressful/difficult times in the past that you have conquered and come through

Make time for something meaningful to you – Pray; Meditate; Journal; Do something kind for yourself or others; Take steps towards a goal; Get outside in nature

Soothe your senses – Take a warm shower/bath, listen to soothing music, light a candle or spray some essential oils, stargaze, put on your favorite lotion/cologne/perfume, bake and enjoy the smells (and tastes), make tea or coffee and enjoy it fully through your senses, smell flowers, eat your favorite food (in moderation of course) and enjoy each bite mindfully, put on your most comfortable clothes and enjoy how they feel; give yourself a manicure or pedicure

Think of something else – Read something interesting or a thriller that you can't put down; Do Crossword Puzzles, Sudoku, or Challenging Riddles; Count backwards from 100 by 3s, Do the alphabet backwards (then try to do it faster and faster without messing up); Name all (pick any category: for example, NFL Teams, Songs by a particular artist, colors, countries in Europe, words that start with the letter “G”, etc); work on something you want to accomplish

Virtual Connections – Conference call/skype/Facetime those you can't physically spend time with (Social Distancing!); plan a happy hour, closet swap/clothing exchange, dance party, workout session, game night, etc.

Activities – Puzzles, Board Games, Coloring, Singing, Play an Instrument, Watch a Favorite Movie or TV Show, Play Video Games, Draw, Cook, Bake, Write in a Journal, Read, Listen to Music, Watch funny YouTube videos, Play cards, Look at pictures, Put on Makeup, Do yard work or Gardening, Go outside and listen (the wind, the birds, rustling of leaves, traffic, chatter, rain), Play with your pet, Knit/Crochet, Take Pictures, Work on the car, Fly a kite, Go for a drive, Write a Blog

Plan something awesome for when this stress is all over: a trip you will take, a party you will throw, people you will see, someplace you will go, etc. This will help you stay in the mindset that THIS WILL PASS and WILL NOT LAST FOREVER.

Do Not Stay in Bed – *Get up and shower, get dressed, go outside, eat something, etc. While you can't do everything, you can do something...*

Call your therapist or a therapist and schedule a teletherapy session. There are many of us willing to help!

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Helpful Websites for Distraction:	
Virtual Tours of Museums around the World	https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours
Funny Dog Videos, Kids Laughing, Bloopers, Yoga or other workout videos, how to videos (makeup or fixing something around the house – there’s something for everyone!) BE MINDFUL when selecting. Pick something intentionally to improve your mood	https://www.youtube.com/
The Metropolitan Opera Streamed Online	https://www.metopera.org/user-information/nightly-met-opera-streams/
Boredom Busters – Ideas for Families	https://familyguide.com/boredom-busters-110-fun-at-home-activities-for-families-kids-2/
Indoor Activities for Kids	https://www.mother.ly/child/montessori-inspired-indoor-activities?rebelltitem=4#rebelltitem4
Virtual Tour through US National Parks	https://www.insider.com/national-parks-america-virtual-tours-3d-visit-2020-3#take-in-the-stunning-canyons-found-in-big-bend-national-park-4
Practice a Foreign Language	Duolingo app or https://www.duolingo.com/

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Virtual Tour of Zoos	https://triblive.com/lifestyles/more-lifestyles/bored-kids-can-take-a-virtual-field-trip-via-zoo-websites/
Be creative!	Pinterest, Instagram... there are ideas everywhere
Educational/Fun Ideas for Kids & Families	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EpUcd8JO3e9gTobQcqijP_bwnWWaEu_eVuGSJHsToYA/mobilebasic
Free Yoga, Online exercise Routines & exercise apps	http://www.freeyogaproject.com Tone it up, daily burn, and lots of other exercise studios and centers are offering free classes this month!
Take a free class	There are hundreds of free Ivy League classes from Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Penn, Princeton and Yale, and I'm sure many other schools are doing the same.
Learn to Cook!	https://pamelasalzman.com/
Educational Resources for everyone trying to suddenly figure out homeschooling!	www.amazingeducationalresources.com
Local Libraries are offering online resources, books, games, movies, etc	Check your local library website
Stay connected with resources that keep you healthy and safe. AA is one form of support that has online meetings. There are many others. Search for what you need.	http://aa-intergroup.org/directory.php